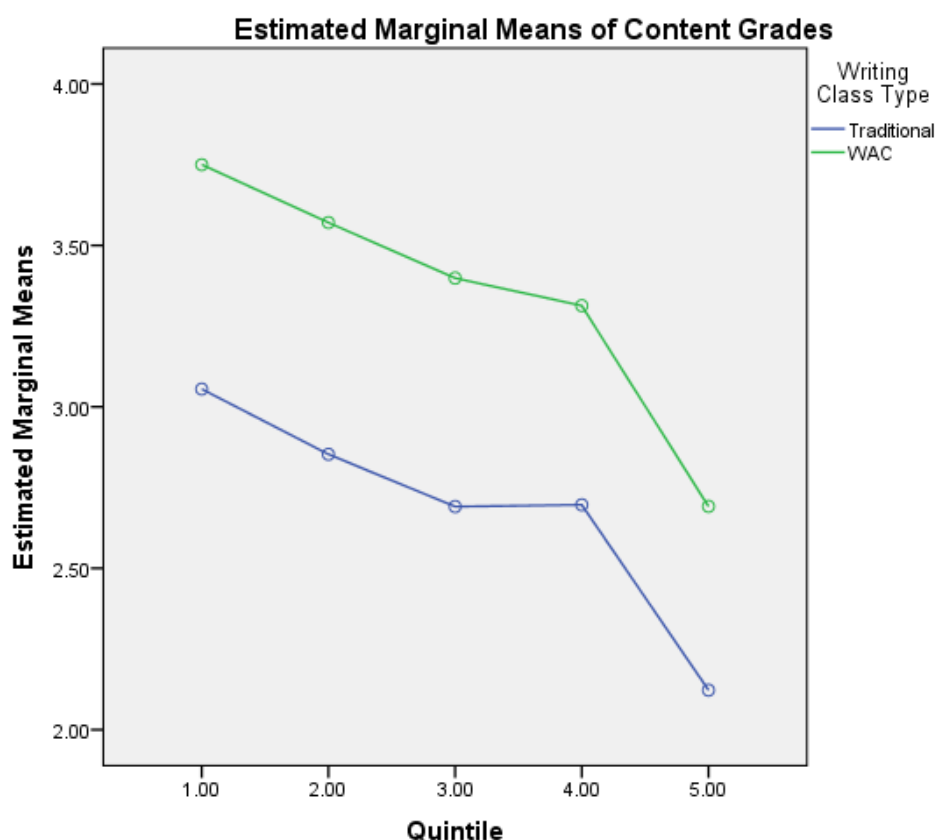


Figure 1

Estimated content grades for WAC/WID or Traditional groups across quintiles.



Note. Quintiles are based on propensity score using gender, geographical region, and writing grades. The fifth quintile has the highest conditional probability of choosing to be enrolled in a WAC/WID class.

Discovering OIL: The Role of Online International Learning and International Field Trips in Enhancing Student Engagement and Performance

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Abstract

Online International Learning (OIL) is an innovative teaching paradigm that facilitates intercultural competence via meaningful online discussions between higher education practitioners and students in distant locations (de Wit 2013). OIL has been elucidated as a collaborative form of pedagogy that enhances 'virtual mobility', collaborative learning and the student experience (ibid).

Similarly, international field trips allow students the opportunity to enhance their cultural awareness by active learning and immersion in new, dynamic and exciting learning environments (Jakubowski 2003). Piggott (2012) argues higher education students revel in experiencing real situations that can often bring what is taught in the classroom 'to life'.

The case study integrated OIL and international field trips as a combined pedagogical strategy with the intention to deliver a best practice policy in assessment. This platform provided the opportunity to share ideas and views, discuss good business practices, explore cultural differences and encourage debate on current global affairs. It is contended that this practice not only fills a 'gap' but is in fact a unique strategy that has not been identifiable in any literature to date and is much deeper than the OIL-only strategy conducted by Villar-Onrubia and Rajpal (2015).

Keywords: Online International Learning, internationalisation of the curriculum, cultural awareness, best-practice assessment, international field trips

Introduction

This paper explores the usage of OIL and international field trips in improving the student experience and performance in examinations. As Pekrun et al. (2002) elucidate, taking examinations is one of the most stressful and unpopular forms of assessment and it is necessary to identify ways in which to make them more effective.

The study discusses how the dual OIL-field trip strategy works and identifies specific recommendations on how to enhance and refine subsequent projects. The article is organised into four areas. First of all, the teaching and learning context will be explained. Then, a review of the relevant literature will be provided. The data that was collected from the research will then be presented and analysed followed by a final section that reflects on the effectiveness of this assessment strategy.

Literature review

The literature review will be divided into two main areas – Internationalisation and OIL and field trips:

Internationalising the curriculum

As Leask (2009) argues, internationalisation of the curriculum involves adding an intercultural dimension into a particular programme in order to support and enhance student progress. Leask (2009) adds the goal of this strategy is to help learners develop greater awareness and understanding so that they are more employable and are able to deal with any issues associated with a globalised marketplace.

Nonetheless, internationalisation of the curriculum is not widespread with only a small number of universities participating in student and staff mobility (Beelen and Deardorff 2015). Jones and Killick (2013) argue many students do not possess the funds to participate in exchanges meaning it is imperative to identify a strategy that would provide exposure to different cultures not only overseas but also on campus with OIL suggested as a potential solution.

Online International Learning

Coventry University (2016) states OIL is a form of 'virtual mobility', specifically intercultural experiences that are embedded into the curriculum that allow interaction with counterparts at partner universities without the need to travel overseas.

Coventry University (2016) identify three main areas integral to any OIL project:

1. The collaboration between a minimum of 2 international universities.
2. Student engagement via online interaction with peers overseas. This may be synchronous or asynchronous.
3. Any OIL project must be connected to learning outcomes which are connected to global perspectives and/or enhancing intercultural competencies.

OIL is arguably a versatile form of pedagogy with project leaders possessing the capability to decide how and to what extent it is embedded in a module. For instance, the platform to host an OIL session (such as video conferencing, Adobe Connect or Skype) is entirely up to the organisers (Coventry University 2016). Moreover, the duration of a session can be adjusted as well as if it is organised in 'real-time' or asynchronously – the latter can be used when there is a significant time difference between countries.

Deardorff (2006: 247-248) contends OIL can lead to greater intercultural competencies and defines this as 'the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes'. De Wit (2013) articulates OIL (also known as COIL – Collaborative Online International Learning in the US) enables students to deepen their cultural understanding on a particular subject without the need to visit a particular destination. De Wit (2013) adds OIL can create closer relationships between teachers and students due to its collaborative nature.

Coventry University (2016) states there are five main benefits for students who participate in OIL projects. These are:

1. Students receive the opportunity to interact with peers in overseas institutions that they would not normally be able to work with.
2. Learners are able to share perspectives on different cultures and enhance their cultural awareness in the process.
3. OIL enables participants the opportunity to learn about different forms of communication, non-verbal cues and body language. This experience provides students with the knowledge to deal with future intercultural interactions.
4. Being able to learn and gain a deeper insight into their subject from a different cultural viewpoint. This will provide experience on dealing with different opinions and beliefs.
5. Students are able to improve their digital literacy as a result of participating in an OIL project. OIL sessions will enhance digital skills that are required to work in today's technologically-driven workplace.

Field trips

As Dewitt and Storksdieck (2008) state, field trips are a valuable strategy in providing opportunities for students to explore and witness relevant scenarios in an authentic setting. Dewitt and Storksdieck (2008) add the learning outcomes from field trips can enhance cognitive and affective results with Jakubowski (2003) contending it is essential that learning outcomes are clearly explained to students prior to any trip in order to encourage greater participation. Nadelson and Jordan (2012) argue field trips expose students to new experiences which can result in more interest in a particular topic, irrespective of previous interest. Secondly, participation in field trips can see affective gains and more positive feelings towards a subject. Furthermore, it is argued that the experiences gained in field trips can be recalled and resonate long after a visit (Behrendt and Franklin 2014). Stainfield et al. (2000) posit international field trips are also useful in developing collaboration between different institutions.

Teaching context

The study took place using at Coventry University London Campus (CULC) in an attempt to implement OIL into the curriculum.

CULC's learning and development strategy places a great deal of emphasis on utilising technology to engage students in their studies although this was the first time OIL had been incorporated into the curriculum. CULC is also committed to developing global graduates through internationalisation activities such as international field trips.

It was decided to incorporate OIL into 'Global Human Resource Management in Practice' as this module focuses on international human resource management (HRM) and students would get the opportunity to develop their cultural awareness of HR functions overseas. Indeed, it was hoped that OIL and a subsequent field trip would give greater cultural understanding to a country-specific case study that would be studied in class. It was also anticipated that student engagement and progression would be increased using this strategy.

There were 15 students in this class from different countries – 6 were Chinese, 4 were Indian, 1 was Bangladeshi, 1 Cameroonian, 1 Ghanaian, 1 Nigerian and 1 Jordanian.

How did it work?

In order to help all 15 students listed above prepare for an examination on international HR practices a case study was sourced from the Czech Republic for a Term 2 MBA module titled 'Global Human Resource

Management in Practice'. The author of the case study was contacted by email and asked if she would be willing to host an OIL session for one hour with our students so they could ask questions prior to their mock examination. Learners were asked to prepare 5 questions each on the case study which was organised on Skype after a trial run had taken place to establish if there were any queries regarding the format or connection issues. Students prepared and participated in the OIL session for one hour, asking specific questions on areas of uncertainty and receiving clarification from the author. The quality of the Skype connection was occasionally inconsistent and required several questions and answers to be re-phrased. A second Skype session was then organised one week later with students on the same course (HRM) in the Czech Republic which enabled a deeper discussion after reflection from the initial conversation. Issues were probed in more depth in the second session with CULC students demonstrating more confidence in the topic by asking more sophisticated questions that were based on theory and wider-reading. Both sessions were communicated in English. Students then undertook their mock examination and received detailed feedback before undertaking their real examination 2 weeks later. The real examination consisted of 2 open-ended questions based on the case study with students having 3 hours to complete both questions. A field trip to the Czech Republic was then organised after the examination where both cohorts could meet face-to-face to discuss the issues in greater depth along with other activities including a guided city tour and company visits to enhance cultural awareness.

Research methods

Data was collected in two different ways – by comparing and analysing the results of the real examination on Moodle with the previous cohort which did not participate in this experiment. Paper-based quantitative feedback was also gathered at the end of the module and collated and distributed to the module team by the senior administrator. The overall student satisfaction percentage on this feedback form was subsequently analysed and compared quantitatively with the previous cohort. The previous cohort was composed of a similar number of students (14) when compared to the present cohort (15) and had a similar breakdown in nationalities (the same nationalities bar Cameroonian and Jordanian were represented with no other nationalities included).

A focus group was additionally conducted after the process to unearth the opinions of the students who were involved in the process. Convenience sampling was employed due to the remainder of the cohort not being on campus. This was comprised of 7 members of the class – 3 Chinese, 2 Indian, 1 Nigerian and 1 Jordanian student. Ethical approval was sought from the participants who were informed they could terminate the discussion at any time without any repercussions. The focus group was conducted before the results of the examination were released in order for the data to be as objective as possible. As Lisossekiti (2003) contends, focus groups can be effective environments in which to obtain objective data. On the other hand, Krueger (1994) criticises focus groups for their potential contamination of results as 'group think' can often take place.

To keep the focus group as consistent as possible, 5 structured questions were employed. These were:

1. To what extent was the OIL session useful in improving knowledge of HRM in the Czech Republic?
2. Did the OIL session give students more confidence before taking the examination?
3. Did the OIL session and field trip to the Czech Republic improve cultural understanding? If so, to what extent?
4. Did the field trip add to the student experience? If so, in what way?
5. How can the OIL and international field trip strategy be improved? What are your recommendations?

The focus group was recorded with permission, subsequently transcribed and kept on an encrypted memory stick in a locked drawer in my office. The data was analysed focusing on the above five themes.

Results

This section will present the end of module feedback questionnaire and compare the grades and progression rate for this cohort and the previous one which did not undertake this strategy. The qualitative findings from the focus group will then be analysed.

Cohort comparison

| | Number of students | Average grade (%) | Progression rate (%) | Student satisfaction (%) |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Previous cohort | 11 | 52.5% | 100% | 89% |
| Current cohort | 15 | 64% | 100% | 100% |

Examination scores on Moodle were collated, averaged and compared with performance in the examination 11.5% higher (with 15 students) than in a previous cohort (11 students) where the dual OIL and field trip strategy was not utilised. The student progression rate was 100%. Student satisfaction rose to 100% from 89%. This was the first time the module had achieved a 100% progression rate and 100% student satisfaction.

Focus group feedback

The feedback was extremely positive with students happy that they were able to clarify any difficult concepts before the examination took place. They were particularly grateful that they had the opportunity to question the actual author of the article. The trip to the Czech Republic was very popular with students being able to develop their understanding of Czech culture and HRM practices. Each question discussed in the focus group will now be analysed:

1. To what extent was the OIL session useful in improving knowledge of HRM in the Czech Republic?

There was unanimous approval of how the OIL project was able to generate more knowledge of HRM practices in the Czech Republic. For example one respondent commented 'I found it a good opportunity to get clarification' and another stated 'It was really fun and interactive. The lecturer was very kind and helpful'. Another participant stated 'We should do this (OIL) for every module!' All comments were wholly positive.

2. Did the OIL session give students more confidence before taking the examination?

Again, the results were very positive with the students commenting on how the session was able to provide deeper understanding of the topic and to clarify culturally-specific information. For instance one student said 'I don't like exams but this (the OIL session) was helpful in increasing my knowledge. It was really good'. Two other students concurred when stating their usual dislike for examinations with the OIL session providing greater confidence. On the other hand the Jordanian student stated he did not dislike examinations although the OIL session was nevertheless useful in building his understanding and confidence of the topic.

3. Did the OIL session and field trip to the Czech Republic improve cultural understanding? If so, to what extent?

The students were very complimentary of how the OIL session was linked to the case study and subsequent field trip. All students said they much preferred this strategy to reading a case study due to the amount of interaction that was involved. For example one student said 'This is much more interesting than just reading' and another commented 'It was much easier to ask the lecturer about a topic and then follow-up questions than just research. I still researched after speaking but I found speaking to the lecturer first more effective for my understanding'.

The field trip was extremely popular with the students who got to visit the university to speak to the professor and students to discuss the topic in more detail, a company visit to a water manufacturer where they received a tour and presentation on Czech HRM practices and a tour of Prague to enhance their cultural awareness. This tour was subsidised by the university as part of the internationalisation programme.

4. Did the field trip add to the student experience? If so, in what way?

Comments were extremely popular with students happy about how the trip was organised and designed to improve their understanding of the subject. Comments such as 'It was an amazing experience', 'I loved it' and 'I learned so much more by visiting Prague' were all received.

All seven students stated this was by far their most favourite module that they had studied as the field trip was able to provide enjoyment, interaction and greater cognition. They were also happy the cost was subsidised (the fee for the whole trip was just £116 after funding).

5. How can the OIL and international field trip strategy be improved? What are your recommendations?

Students wanted to see this strategy embedded into other modules, particularly in Term 1 when it is important to have a clear understanding of what to do. They also recommended the field trip take place before the examination. With regards to the OIL project, one student suggested using a different form of technology as the Skype connection was occasionally inconsistent. This was actually investigated although the university in the Czech Republic had no other form of technology that could have been used. Another student suggested visiting in summer when the weather would be better. However, this particular module does not run then and this was the only available time the university in Prague could host us.

Overall, the focus group demonstrated OIL and the subsequent field trip helped develop students to build their confidence and boost their morale in acquiring new skills and knowledge prior to taking their examination.

Conclusion

The results of this project arguably confirm the literature which describes OIL as an innovative teaching paradigm that facilitates intercultural competence, enhances 'virtual mobility', collaborative learning and improves the student experience.

Student performance was much higher (an increase of 11.5%) than in the previous cohort when this strategy was not employed. The progression rate was 100% and student satisfaction rose to 100% from 89%.

The feedback was extremely positive with students happy that they were able to clarify any difficult concepts before the examination took place. They were particularly grateful that they had the opportunity to question the actual author of the article. The trip to the Czech Republic was very popular with students being able to develop their understanding of Czech culture and HRM practices. This allowed students the opportunity to enhance their cultural awareness by active learning and immersion in new, dynamic and exciting learning environments and by experiencing real situations that brought the examination case study 'to life'.

This combined strategy will arguably enable students perform to a higher level and to demonstrate to future employers that they have the ability to participate in virtual discussions on a range of topics with counterparts from diverse cultural backgrounds.

General limitations

Although the implementation of the OIL initiative was the only extra activity employed compared to the previous cohort it is not certain that it solely contributed to the rise in progression and student satisfaction. Moreover less than half of the class participated in the focus group (as the others were not available) and these results may not effectively represent the opinions of the whole cohort.

OIL limitations

The quality of the initial Skype call could have been better although this was due to an inconsistent connection in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, it is vitally important for all students to have read the case study and to have prepared questions before the OIL session in order for it to work. Moreover, there were few Czech students (the composition of the class was much the same as ours with many students

coming from China, India and African countries). This meant we had to focus the questions in the OIL session and field trip visit to the Professor who was able to answer in detail. There were also several issues with language with students requiring the professor and her students to occasionally repeat what they said.

Field trip limitations

As there is a cost for the international field trip (albeit most of it is funded as mentioned above) participation is optional meaning those that are not able or do not wish to go will not attain the same quality of experience as those that do attend. It would have been helpful had the field trip taken place before the examination although this was not possible due to availability issues with the university in Prague. Two students were also unable to secure a visa.

Ideas for future research

It will be beneficial to continue this strategy with different cohorts in order to ascertain if OIL is as effective as it seems. Future plans include continuing the same approach with HR students studying case studies on Denmark and Finland.

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Book Reviews

Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies

Linda Adler-Kassner & Elizabeth Wardle (Eds.)

Boulder: UP of Colorado (2015)

Review by Courtney Stanton

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In the introduction to *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, Kathleen Blake Yancey acknowledges that a collection of disciplinary concepts could easily be seen as a sort of canon, one with ‘an explicit emphasis on definition and the implication of dogma’ (xix). Yet, the intention of this new work, helmed by editors Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, is not to codify but simply to understand and more meaningfully frame that which is still seemingly missing in composition scholarship: consensus about disciplinary content.

For those beyond the field, this admission might seem confusing. External stakeholders—administrators, other faculty, etc.—often assume that writing courses are devoid of content, with writing acting only as a medium for other subjects. Composition classes, through this lens, are meant to teach students *how to write* about other topics, not *about writing*. *Naming What We Know* responds to this misconception, knowing that a misunderstanding of writing courses as necessarily simple or conceptually empty contributes to a broader devaluing of the field itself. Adler-Kassner and Wardle, two long-time supporters of the writing studies movement in composition, acknowledge in their opening chapter that composition has long struggled to articulate its collective knowledge, particularly to those stakeholders beyond our writing programs who often have considerable influence over pedagogy. Indeed, even within the field itself there is not always agreement as to what the actual content of writing courses is, or should be. As Adler-Kassner and Wardle explain, this lack of disciplinary consensus has adversely affected the field, since despite the decades of research that have taught us more about how writing works, how best to teach it in our classrooms, etc., ‘we continue to lose the battle over discussions of writing to stakeholders who have money, power, and influence but little related expertise’ (7). To have the most meaningful influence, then, on not only our students but also our own work as teachers and scholars of writing, we need to more actively—and more explicitly—establish our disciplinary frame. This is a crucial step for composition, and *Naming* does a fine job of beginning a more clearly defined path forward for writing studies.

The first section of the book presents threshold concepts—defined in the preface by Ray Land as ‘the conceptual and ontological shifts students must undertake to achieve capability’—found in composition, as a way to, as the title suggests, put a name to what we actually know (xiii). Adler-Kassner and Wardle expand on the definition of threshold concepts in their introductory chapter, laying the groundwork for the many who are likely unfamiliar, given their fledgling status in composition scholarship. The editors offer more than thirty concepts in this first section, conveniently organizing them into five overarching categories, such as ‘Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity’ and ‘All Writers Have More to Learn.’ Within these broader categories, authors explore specific concepts of composition which, their inclusion argues, are axiomatic to composition’s identity. Each entry is typically no more than two pages long and offers an encyclopedic look at a specific sliver of disciplinary knowledge. Under ‘Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity,’ for instance, David R. Russell offers an entry titled ‘Writing Mediates Activity,’ in which he explains how writing ‘comes between, intervenes in—the activity of people,’ the differences in this regard between writing and other forms of communication, and how this concept can be troublesome (26-7). The ability of Russell and others throughout this first section to capture these incredibly sticky subjects with such concision is indeed impressive. Many of them certainly warrant much greater development, but given the purposes of the book and the need to set forth as many ideas as is reasonable in this first collection, their brevity is understandable.

The larger second section of the book is devoted to exploring how these concepts and others yet to be explored can be used in practice, and Adler-Kassner and Wardle have clearly attempted to cast a wide net with their examples. They offer chapters on all of the major sites of composition—first-year writing, writing centers, WAC/WID, even doctoral programs—and they include discussions of some of the major